Mr. Jonathan Yardley
Book World
The Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
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Dear Mr. Yardley,

I write you rather than Ms. King because you may remember some of my background and because I am disturbed by Mr. Prettyman's review of Laura Kalman's biography of Abe Fortas. I do not allege or believe that Mr. Prettyman does not faithfully review the book nor can I, based on his review, allege that she is unfair to Fortas or his wife. Yet I have the feeling of unfairness and that Fortas is held to standards not applied to others in his position.

It is not that I object to showing the warts, which we all have and which I have done in seven books. My books are on the most controversial subject of our political assassinations. I've gotten between 15,000 and 20,000 letters about them and innumerable phone calls. These do not include a single complaint about unfairness and some of those of whom I was critical became friends. My point is that reporting human flaws does not require unfairness.

What Mr. Prettyman does not say is that the firm of Arnold,Fortas and Porter took the so-called "security" cases without fee. With all the imputations of greed this is an omission I regret. Also missing is any reference to the loss of clients to a firm specializing in government relations in those earliest days of cold-war hysteria. This was a real risk to a fledgling law firm in those days.

It happens that I'd known Thurman Arnold when he headed the Department of Justice anti-trust division and I took him what I developed in a series of Nazi cartel stories I did as an investigative reporter. I'd known Paul Porter when he was practising law after leaving, if I remember correctly, the FCC. They, along with Fortas, who I'd not until then met, agreed to represent 10 of us fired without charges or hearing by the State Department in what amounted to a pogrom under the anti-~~communist~~democratic McCarran Rider. Because the rider provided that anyone in named agencies could be fired without any cause given, without charges, and without hearing, they faced a more formidable task than representing those fired with some form of due process. They were so successful we were all rehired, with a public apology -really unheard of - and we all resigned.

I knew Carol Agger slightly when I was the editor of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee and she, as a lawyer for the National Relations Board, helped us. She did not then, as a young woman, appear to be "enamored of huge amounts of money" but in fact was so principled she wore unattractive lisle stockings as a protest against Japanese atrocities in China.

I know of a mission Fortas undertook for LBJ, of which I entirely disapprove, that amounted to an effort to rewrite a major event in our history. But he is not alone, not even among justices of the Supreme Court, in having departed from accepted practise. From the Prettyman review there is no reason to believe that Kalman, in fairness, made any reference to them. Like Earl Warren becoming chairman of the Presidential commission that bears his name when it appeared certain that the Jack Ruby case would go to the Court. Or Justice Jackson on the largely whitewashing Pearl Harbor commission.

So much about the prominent does not get reported at all. For example, relating to the Court, Gerald Ford's associates in his campaign to "get" Justice Douglas. These included E. Howard Hunt and the Watergater's first lawyer, Douglas Caddy. The Post omitted this in its superb Watergate reporting. If my recollection is corect, it also made no reference to this when as our first unelected President Ford plugged an anti-labor book by Caddy. Nor, for that matter, did it report that Ford perjured himself before the Senate Judiciary Committee at the hearings on his confirmation.

The last time I saw Fortas was at the memorial for Cliff Durr, who had refused to accept reappointment to the FCC by Truman because of Truman's misnamed " security" ploy, exposed for what it really was by Carl Bernstein in his book on his parents. Durr, if you do not recall, returned to Alabama instead and practised civil-rights law, not a way to get rich. I believe he then represented Rosa Parks when she refused to take a back seat on a Birmingham bus.

We all of us have flaws, including those of us who try not to.

I get the impression from the Prettyman review of the Kalman book that she lacked balance if not also fairness in her account of the life of a fine man to whom the country is greatly indebted for the truly fine things he did by exaggerated reference to those thing for which he is subject to criticism.

Compare, for example, with the public and press treatment of both Nixon as a person and of his books after he was the first President to resign to avoid imoeachment.

We mistreat out liberals this way, not our conservatives.

There is another item in today's Book World that is minor but you may find interesting. It relates to Richard Abshire, under "Chandler in Dallas". Under the name of "Anderson" Abshire agreed to be the ghost writer for the despicable Ricky White who seeks wealth from the complete fabircation, that his father was one of JFK's assassins. The Post did not mention this but it got considerable attention elsewhere. Well, it is not a complete fabrication. Some of it is cribbed from a novel, some from a cheap novel pretended to be non-fiction and some from a potboiler that pretended to be a book reviewing three books. I understand that White and Abshire have parted ways, but initially he went for White's palpably untenable concoction.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

My reference to LBJ's effort to rewrite part of our history, using Fortas as his agent, in this letter to Yardley, dates to the first wave of books critical of the official solution to the JFK assassination. Fortas, from the FBI's own records, was uneasy and opposed to what LBJ wanted - for J. Edgar Hoover to write a book cricical of the critics.

Fortas did go to the FBI on it. The people he dealt with there perceived his lack of enthusiasm for the idea, and they evolved a different approach that Fortas jumped at to get the thing over with.

The FBI got a friendly reporter, Sid Epstein, then of the Washington Star, to write a letter to Hoover, in return for which he would get an exclusive response that would make news. The FBI drafted the letter for Epstein and he used the letter it gave him to write it.

The FBI then used this letter as the peg on which to hang a four-page press release that got international attention.

I have these records in the subject file under the Star and Epstein and perhaps under Fortas.